

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
8 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Indochina
(As of 1600 EDST)
No. 6

VIETNAM

Politics After the Bombing

1. Calm has returned to Saigon following this morning's bombing of the presidential palace. As yet, there is no confirmation of the plane's destination. The pilot of the plane has been identified as a close relative of South Vietnam's ambassador to Thailand.

2. The bombing appears to have been the lone act of a disgruntled pilot whose family reportedly was left behind at Da Nang. [redacted] the attack caught senior government military commanders by surprise. Operations at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airbase including civilian flights by international carriers were suspended temporarily but have now resumed.

3. The attack apparently surprised former air force commander Nguyen Cao Ky, who immediately contacted the American Embassy to profess his innocence. Despite these disclaimers, however, some members of Thieu's entourage suspect that even if Ky did not specifically order the attack, his recent actions contributed to it. [redacted]

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DOS and JCS
review(s) completed.

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4. Thieu's speech on national radio immediately following the attack was intended to dispel rumors that a coup had been successfully conducted against the President and that he or members of his family had been injured. Following that address, the government implemented some additional measures to tighten security in the Saigon area, but field reports indicate that there has been no panic and that the people are reacting to the situation calmly. Units from the Airborne Division, which Thieu trusts, have been brought into Saigon to reinforce the presidential guard around the palace and some additional roadblocks have been established at the City's outskirts. Orders to move a Marine unit into Saigon were cancelled for fear that these soldiers might be encouraged to support a coup effort.

5. Thieu also indicated in his speech that he had no intention of stepping down and he apparently has ordered a special meeting of his military advisers to give at least the appearance of business as usual. There are no reliable indications that any of his military commanders are conspiring against the president or that any of them have now been persuaded to launch a coup.

A New Cabinet This Weekend

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6. Prime Minister Can [redacted] he hopes to have a new cabinet together by this weekend. He said it would include members of the civilian opposition, although he admitted that he has been having trouble trying to persuade Buddhist and Catholic elements to join. He apparently has picked up the support of labor leader Tran Quoc Buu, who is working hard to encourage all segments of the opposition to rally behind the new government. Buu's argument is that Thieu is too weak to pose many obstacles to a strong combination of nationalist elements and that moves to replace Thieu forcibly would only add to the current problems confronting the country.

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New Communist Instructions

7. The Communists apparently feel the military momentum is on their side and [] have called for a continuation of their present offensive until "total victory" is achieved this year. The Communists' Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) reportedly issued the new instructions on April 3, updating an earlier resolution which stated that total victory would not be attempted until 1976.

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8. [] the new guidelines maintain that "the most opportune time for the Communist side has arrived" and that attacks to liberate Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia and Binh Duong provinces will be conducted in April. The timing for a final assault against Saigon, however, will apparently await the outcome of these battles -- the instructions state that an attack on Saigon will occur "at an appropriate time."

9. The new guidelines apparently leave little room for considering a political settlement short of surrender. Talk of negotiations with the government or the formation of a tripartite coalition, according to the guidelines, will be used "merely as stratagems" to "isolate" the South Vietnamese.

10. The guidelines do not indicate what units will be involved in the attacks, but state that the Communists have sufficient strength in the region to "liberate" Tay Ninh Province. They apparently hope, however, that local Viet Cong political assets can make the military task easier by appealing to South Vietnamese civilian and military personnel to revolt against the government and join the Communist side. Plans already are underway, [] to identify which members of the government's administrative apparatus would be useful to the Viet Cong following their takeover and have instructed local cadre to begin making contacts with these people.

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North Vietnamese Pull Back From Moc Hoa

11. The South Vietnamese have won the first round in the fight for the northern delta. The heavy communist shellings on April 7, originally thought by South Vietnamese

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officials to be the beginning of a major ground engagement, were apparently actions to screen the withdrawal of the major North Vietnamese forces from the battlefield. Saigon's forces were prepared to fight the Communist force and officials believed they had the military strength to defend the area successfully.

12. The Communists, however, encountered difficulties in launching the attack. By the time they managed to solve their supply and transportation problems, the South Vietnamese were able to deploy substantial reinforcements and were directing air and artillery strikes into the Communist concentrations. By late yesterday, most of the North Vietnamese 5th Division had pulled back to the Cambodian border area, and the South Vietnamese were bombing the withdrawing units.

13. The Communists have been shifting some of their 3rd Division from Tay Ninh Province south towards the delta, and these units could be used in combination with the regrouping 5th Division to again attack Moc Hoa in the coming weeks. It is also possible that new orders have been issued to the North Vietnamese units to now concentrate elsewhere, probably to the east in the provinces closer to Saigon. The government's decision to stand and fight around Moc Hoa and the Communist move away from the fray should raise the morale of other government forces now defending other critical areas.

Tactical Lull Continues

14. The general lull in military activity continues in the provinces around Saigon, and the level of Communist-initiated attacks in the delta has fallen off. Many of the Communist initiatives have been in Dinh Tuong Province, but the numerous shellings and ground probes there have given them no significant gains.

15. Communist pressure on Can Tho City is also easing with some parts of the North Vietnamese 4th Division withdrawing to the west. The commander of the South Vietnamese 21st Division believes that after 11 days of almost continuous contact, during which the Communists were also hit hard by air and artillery strikes, the three regiments of the 4th Division badly need supplies, replacements, and rest.

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[REDACTED]

Because the 21st Division commander expects the North Vietnamese to assault the city again within the next few days, he is directing artillery fire and air strikes against known concentrations of Communist troops and supply caches in the vicinity of Can Tho.

Mood of the JGS

16. [REDACTED] has reported that a mood of depression is prevalent throughout the staff. The JGS is now totally involved in planning the reorganization of the army. The official explained that because all the military decision making is now done only at the presidential palace, the JGS does not know what is happening in the field, or going to happen, until after the fact. Because of this, many of the officers at the JGS reportedly do not even come to work but are devoting considerable time to personal plans for the care of their families in the event of a Communist victory which many see as imminent. 25X1

The Situation at Nha Trang

17. [REDACTED] does not indicate that government forces have reoccupied the city of Nha Trang. No concentrations of government troops or operational equipment were seen. Contrary to South Vietnamese reports yesterday, there was no activity at the airfield, and only fishing boats could be seen in the harbor. [REDACTED] normal civilian traffic moving through the city. 25X1

18. Several North Vietnamese antiaircraft positions were observed along the beach and at a nearby soccer field. Soviet-made trucks were also in town. The only other military activity [REDACTED] were air attacks in progress to cut the roads leading from the city. 25X1

CAMBODIA

The Tactical Situation

19. Khmer Communist forces launched new attacks against government units holding riverside positions on the east bank of the Mekong River near Phnom Penh today. Ground fighting on most other fronts around the capital was limited to inconclusive shellings and skirmishes. Shelling attacks against Pochentong airport have also slackened somewhat during the past 24 hours, although the proportion of artillery to the less accurate rocket rounds has increased.

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20. In the countryside, stiff fighting continued today around the southwestern provincial capital of Kompong Speu, and several positions just outside the town are isolated. In the southeast, the Communists are keeping steady pressure on the defensive perimeter around the provincial capital of Prey Veng, but government units there appear to be holding their own.

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Evacuation Status

21. The US Mission staff in Phnom Penh has been reduced to 58 persons and the number of non-official Americans in the capital should now number less than 100. Small numbers of Cambodians have also been leaving aboard airlift flights leaving Pochentong airport, but the total number of Cambodians on the evacuation list presumably still stands at more than 600. Security forces at Pochentong today began preventing vehicles carrying Cambodian employees of the US Mission from entering the airfield, but Ambassador Dean intended to take immediate steps to resolve this situation.

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Political Developments

22. Prime Minister Long Boret returned to Phnom Penh today amid intense speculation that some sort of breakthrough toward "negotiations" has occurred. Much of the speculation was fueled by Thai Foreign Minister Chatchai's disclosure to newsmen that Boret met with a "representative of the opposition government" while in Bangkok and by Boret's own claim that peace prospects had been explored in both Thailand and Indonesia. Boret's discussions in Bangkok were almost certainly with Sihanouk's son, Prince Yuvaneath, but it is doubtful that Yuvaneath could do much more than relay some message to his father.

23. Boret's allusion to a possible Indonesian role in trying to spark a dialogue with the other side is curious. Lon Non and Suharto almost certainly discussed negotiation prospects when they met in Bali on April 5, and the Indonesians in the past have tried to encourage talks between the two Cambodian sides. There is no evidence, however, that Jakarta has made any recent initiatives in regard to Cambodian negotiations.

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24. Ambassador Dean met with acting president Saukham Koy yesterday and this morning. Koy said that he planned to confer with Boret as soon as the latter returned in order to decide upon a course of action. On Sunday, Koy told US Congressional staff members that under present conditions the "best feasible solution" would be to invite Sihanouk back and tie the invitation to an agreement that Communist forces would not enter Phnom Penh or hinder the flow of relief supplies to the city. This may be the proposal Koy plans to put before Boret. In any event, Koy claimed that a course of action would be decided within the next day and that the government would then try to get a message through to the other side either through private channels or by public media.

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